

## IMMIGRANT ADVOCACY GROUP (IAG)

### STEERING COMMITTEE

JANUARY 26, 2024

- Present: Christopher O’Keeffe, Mary Lesko, Mary Hughes, Carol Geyer, Peter McLaughlin, Mi-Rang Yoon, Mary Skinner, Ed Marakovitz, Bill Mitchell (Guest)
- Opening Prayer: Mary Lesko presented the opening prayer (see attached).
- Welcome Circle: Carol reported:
  - Extensive paperwork with feds, making progress
  - Require Paulist Center approval for agreement with Temple Aliyah, Needham, which is administering the \$100,000 anonymous donation to fund this project
  - Not sure where the families are, perhaps still in Ukraine, but we’re in steady email communication with them.
- Haitian Family: Bill reported:
  - In response to IAG message in Weekly Missive Carol Mitchell called Ronnie Miller of the State Office of Refugees and Immigrants (MORI) ; he referred a Haitian family of 5, mother and father and three children to them; the Mitchells provided temporary housing in their loft.
  - The Mitchells made arrangements for a second temporary location but they then received a call that more permanent housing in Dorchester had been arranged by the housing specialist at Middlesex Human Services Agency.
  - The family moved to this apartment near Uphams Corner, Dorchester and the Mitchells and other volunteers continued support.
  - Discussion focused on the lack of clarity of who/what is *responsible* for the family
    - Family has EBT card for food and has been granted Temporary Protected Status (TPS) until August at least with potential renewal at that time.
    - TPS status comes with work authorization but an earlier application by the family has not been approved. The family has no document to show a potential employer their approval to work. Mi-Rang will review their TPS document and seek clarity on how to confirm work authorization granted through TPS.
    - Although Middlesex Human Services Agency arranged the housing for the family, it has not designated a “case manager” for the family; the only contact is with the housing specialist.
    - Mary Skinner explained that the Watertown Refugee and Immigrant Support group provides services for 44 families in a motel without formal a relationship with a “responsible resettlement agency”. However the

families were placed in the motel by the state government, presumably MORI, so we may assume the state has some level of responsibility and coordination for the families.

- Partnership with International Institute of New England (IINE): Chris reported:
  - A partnership with IINE seemed the answer to our quest for a well-organized agency able and willing to provide opportunities for PC volunteers to participate in direct assistance to migrants
  - Issues include:
    - Will recruiting volunteers for IINE undermine recruiting for our Welcome Circle and/or the Haitian family and/or policy advocacy?
    - Recruiting in general or for specific roles?
    - Volunteers for IINE to list Paulist Center in the “company” space on their applications, thereby allowing us, with IINE cooperation, to track who of our members is volunteering through IINE
    - We might convene Paulist Center volunteers for IINE to meet together with one of several foci being the Catholic faith-based implications of volunteering
    - Peter suggested the need for an informal “switchboard” to alert volunteers of upcoming or present needs, which match their interests; volunteers might express such interests and their availability on certain days/time, etc.
- Policy Advocacy Committee: Chris reported:
  - A committee has been recruited: Bill Bagley, Robin Chan, Liz Duclos-Orsello, Adrienne Murphy and Chris O’Keeffe.
  - Chris will compile notes from the Committee’s recent meeting and distribute them to Steering Committee; he also will distribute his recent testimony on Safe Communities Act
- Update of Website: Chris reported:
  - Chris is working on a description of IAG and its activities for posting on the Paulist Center website as a link under the “social justice” tab. He will distribute his draft to the Steering Committee for input via a Google Group.
- Volunteer Recruiting: Ed reported
  - Ed referred to his memo “Recruiting Volunteers, January 2024 (see attached) and gave a brief overview
    - Why we recruit volunteers:
      - To fulfill our Christian calling to “welcome the stranger”;

- To provide our members with opportunities to support and advocate for immigrants in response to this calling;
- To provide direct assistance to immigrants and work for public policy supporting them.
- The volunteer roles we are recruiting for:
  - Resettling refugee families from Afghanistan, Ukraine, and Haiti
  - Advocating for public policy supportive of immigrants
  - Supporting a wider range of immigrants through volunteer work organized by the International Institute of New England
- There are many activities we could undertake to recruit volunteers but we can't do all of them. We need a plan to decide which activities to prioritize and who would carry them out.
- During the ensuing discussion many of the same issues came up with had been discussed earlier in the meeting, such as:
  - Will recruiting for IINE undermine our efforts to recruit volunteers for the Ukrainian, Haitian and Afghan resettlement projects?
  - The need for group meetings among Paulist Center volunteers and an informal "switchboard" as described above.
- Ed asked Mi-Rang, Peter, and Mary Skinner to work with him to discuss this further, develop a recruiting plan and submit it to the Steering Committee for input, approval and/or amendment. They each agreed to work on this.
- Chris suggested that the Steering Committee meet again in the spring, perhaps in April. Committee members agreed.

Recorded by,

Ed Marakovitz

Attachments: Opening Prayer; Recruiting Volunteers, January 2024